

David Martinez, Jr., President & Beverly J. Coho, Vice President  
Board of Trustees, Ramah Navajo School Board, Inc.  
Ramah Navajo Reservation, Cibola County, Pine Hill, New Mexico

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CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY

Submitted to the United States Congress:

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES

FY 2014 Federal Budget Request for:

BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS (BIA) / BUREAU OF INDIAN  
EDUCATION (BIE) & INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE (DHHS/IHS)

APRIL 18, 2013

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

**Request Summary:** On behalf of the Board of Trustees of the Ramah Navajo School Board, Inc., (RNSB), we are respectfully requesting funding to address three major needs of the Ramah Band of Navajo Indians, located on the Ramah Navajo Reservation, Cibola County, New Mexico. We are requesting Congress to (1.) Appropriate and/or instruct the Bureau of Indian Affairs to make available funding from its FI&R or other funds, \$2.8 million for major rehabilitation and upgrades to the water infrastructure of the Ramah Navajo School Board (which supports Pine Hills Schools, Early Childhood programs, the Pine Hill Community Health programs, Behavioral Health and Social Services, adult education, KTDB Public Radio Station, community services and many other ancillary programs and administration facilities); (2.) appropriate \$2.1 million for a new DOI BIA/BIE " Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Complex" at Pine Hill Schools; and (3.) \$3.63 million for a "Ramah Navajo Community Elder Services Center."

**Background.** The Ramah Navajo School Board was founded in 1970 by the Ramah Navajo Chapter of the Navajo Nation to *"provide charitable, benevolent, social, educational and related services as needed by the Ramah Navajo community."* From that humble beginning, a Native American community took control of their destiny and started the first local Indian community controlled school from scratch in modern time -- and eventually came to govern the K-12 Pine Hill Schools, the Indian Health Services Pine Hill Health Center, and 30- plus other educational, health and community services programs on the behalf of the Ramah Band of Navajo Indians. It was this groundbreaking action that precipitated the Indian Self-Determination movement that resulted in the passage of PL 93-638, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Act in 1974. Congress has been instrumental in our community effort to provide culturally relevant, high quality and efficient services for our people. I want to thank the Congress for the support that it has provided to our community over the past 42 years.

The Ramah Navajo people are well aware of the current fiscal constraints in our country and the many difficult decisions that must be made to restore economic prosperity for all Americans.



That being said, the Federal Government, mainly through the BIA and IHS, has an historic, long-standing responsibility for the education, health and protection of natural resources for the Ramah Band of Navajo Indians under Treaty obligation. Long before the current economic downturn, Indian communities such as ours, have struggled to provide basic services for our members. The BIE school system, for example, has long been underfunded and the FY 2014 proposed budget falls far short of remedying this state of affairs. Given the importance of education and health to the future viability of our community, we hope that the Congress will recognize and address the very real funding needs of our community. We face unique challenges of rural isolation, over 70% real unemployment and lack of economic development opportunity, non-Native encroachment and an often hostile relationship with entrenched federal bureaucracies and so depend on the direct federal relationship and receptivity of Congress to continue to provide essential programs and services for the Ramah Band of Navajo Indian people. We respectfully request Congress to favorably consider our three priorities:

**Priority One Request: Appropriate and/or instruct the Bureau of Indian Affairs to make available funding from its FI&R or other funds, \$2.8 million for major rehabilitation and upgrades to the water infrastructure of the Ramah Navajo School Board facilities. This is a LIFE THREATENING situation and these repairs are urgently needed now.** We are in need of funds to address an on-going water crisis we are experiencing: just a few months ago, we experienced a catastrophic water crisis that resulted in loss of water (and as a result, no sewage/waste systems) affecting all RNSB operations and staff housing as well as nearly 1,200 community embers in NHA housing. The water infrastructure was originally built to accommodate the school with some administration buildings. Now it is burdened beyond capacity. The system is old and deteriorating and must be re-habilitated and upgraded. Specifically:

- a) Conduct comprehensive hydrology study to assess water availability and water table. This will allow us to utilize our current wells most efficiently and prevent future damage to wells and well pumps.
- b) Secure services of engineering firm to conduct comprehensive Preliminary Engineering Report (PER) that will assess current system, identify deficiencies and prepare preliminary scope of work and costs for the RNSB water system.
- c) Repair and/or replace well operating control panels.
- d) Re-habilitate water treatment plant including upgrading/replacing control systems and installing new filtrations systems.
- e) Install flow-meters on wells and treated water outflow.
- f) Install shut-off valve on RNSB water system (to all off campus, including to 500,000 gallon storage tank). The shut-off to 500,000 storage tank needs to include an emergency open-gate in case of fire (we require four hours of fire suppression and we get this currently from the 500,000 gallon tank).
- g) Install water-tower storage tank @ 500,000 gallons capacity on RNSB campus.
- h) Install meters on all RNSB facilities, including all individual housing units, in order to be able to establish rates for billing (required for generating sufficient funding for operations, maintenance and upgrades).
- i) Replace water mains throughout staff housing.
- j) Initiate rigorous training and certification program for RNSB water operators.



- k) Initiate and maintain water testing in compliance with EPA standards and regulations.
- l) Install fencing and access/safety limits to water treatment plant
- m) Install well-head safety and protection parameters

**Priority Two Request: Appropriate \$2.1 million for a new DOI BIA/BIE " Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Complex" at Pine Hill Schools.** Our early childhood education programs -- Head Start, Family and Child Education (FACE), Early Intervention, and Day Care -- are currently housed in (what was supposed to be) temporary portable buildings that are scattered around the campus and all are in need of repair or renovation. These facilities are aging and do not meet code. We need funding to plan, design and construct a complex to house these crucial programs. Though federal law and regulations for each of these programs vary, consolidating these programs in a single location and developing a special atmosphere addressing the needs of young children, we can accommodate the over 215 children we serve in attractive, efficient and safe facilities that promote healthy development and critical learning.

**Priority Three Request: Appropriate \$3.63 million for a "Ramah Navajo Community Elder Services Center."** There is a great need in our community for a safe, secure center where we can provide comprehensive services to our very vulnerable elders. Our population is aging and it is becoming increasingly "at risk" due to demographic, economic/poverty, societal change and isolation stressors. We need to secure funding to plan, design and contract for rehabilitation/construction of a Ramah Band of Navajo Indians Senior Citizens' Services Center. This project will rehabilitate our current Behavior Health facility (formerly a group home so with full kitchen, common and privacy rooms and a culturally relevant Navajo/Hogan design) located approximate to the Pinehill Health Center to accommodate comprehensive day services for our vulnerable seniors.

**Response on Budget Sequestration:** The Sequestration is a death sentence, literally for our Elders, for our youth's dreams of success and our improvements and expansions program plans. Our community has been dealing with federal under-funded programs for decades and has struggled to provide much needed services in education, health, law enforcement, child welfare, Elder care and housing to name just a few. We live in an isolated geographic area far from the convenience of urban life with no economic base. Even with limited funding, we depend heavily on federal funds to provide employment for our community. We hardly have any unsubsidized employment. If we lose the base federal contracts in delivering services we would face a 95 to 100 % unemployment rate for our community. **HEALTH CARE ESPECIALLY NEEDS AN EXEMPTION FROM SEQUESTRATION.** "A recent *New York Times* Lead Editorial demanded this."

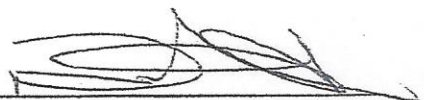
The efforts of our work in improving our community is in jeopardy due to the federal sequestration, we are reducing our staff size in healthcare that forces us to ration healthcare, education with loss of teachers, social services in providing much needed child and adult protective services, as well as cuts in program operations and delivery of services, and foregoing much needed maintenance and repairs of our infrastructures that have far exceeded their use of life.

With the rescissions and sequestration for the next ten years, our community will suffer more economic hardship. More of our people will leave their homes to seek employment elsewhere disrupting our families and increasing more social issues in domestic violence, abuse, neglect and substance abuse.

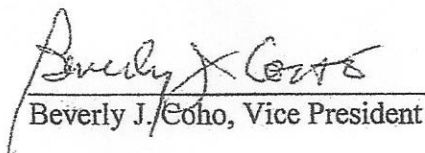
We do not want this to happen and implore upon you to protect our community by exempting the Indian Health Services and Bureau of Indian Affairs from sequestration, just as you have done for the Veteran Affairs programs. Our community has many veterans and active-duty young women and men in the military and we ask that you appropriate sufficient resources to meet our Native veteran families and community families.

We thank the Subcommittee for considering our requests. If you have any questions, please contact Bennie Coho, Executive Director at (505) 775-4152.

Respectfully Submitted,



David Martinez, Jr., President  
Board of Trustees



Beverly J. Coho, Vice President

Ramah Navajo School Board, Inc.  
P.O. Box 10  
Pine Hill, New Mexico 87357

505-775-3256, E-mail: [ExecutiveOffice@rnsb.k12.nm.us](mailto:ExecutiveOffice@rnsb.k12.nm.us).